

# The War with Mexico

## MAIN IDEA

The United States expanded its territory westward to stretch from the Atlantic to the Pacific coast.

## WHY IT MATTERS NOW

Today, one-third of all Americans live in the areas added to the United States in 1848.

## TERMS & NAMES

James K. Polk  
manifest destiny  
Zachary Taylor  
Bear Flag Revolt

Winfield Scott  
Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo  
Mexican Cession

## ONE AMERICAN'S STORY

Henry Clay sneered, "Who is James K. Polk?" Clay had just learned the name of the man nominated by Democrats to run against him for president in 1844. "A mistake!" answered Washington insiders.

News of Polk's nomination was flashed to the capital by the newly invented telegraph machine. People were convinced that the machine didn't work. How could the Democrats choose Polk? A joke!

Polk was America's first "dark horse," a candidate who received unexpected support. The Democrats had nominated this little-known man only when they could not agree on anyone else.

Still, Polk wasn't a complete nobody. He had been governor of Tennessee and served seven terms in Congress. Polk was committed to national expansion. He vowed to annex Texas and take over Oregon.

When the votes were counted, James Knox Polk became the 11th president of the United States. As you will read in this section, after his election Polk looked for ways to expand the nation.



James Polk

## Taking Notes

Use your chart to take notes about Oregon, New Mexico, and California.

	Types of people who traveled there
New Mexico	
Utah	
Oregon	
Texas	
California	

## Americans Support Manifest Destiny

The abundance of land in the West seemed to hold great promise for Americans. Although populated with Native Americans and Mexicans, those lands were viewed by white settlers as unoccupied. Many Americans wanted to settle those lands themselves, and they worried about competition from other nations. Mexico occupied the southwest lands, and Britain shared the northwest Oregon Territory with the United States. Many Americans believed that the United States was

destined to stretch across the continent from the Atlantic Ocean to the Pacific Ocean. In 1845, a newspaper editor named John O'Sullivan gave a name to that belief.

#### A VOICE FROM THE PAST

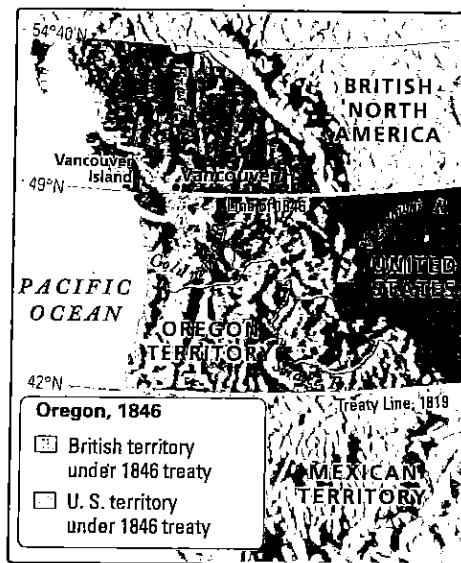
Our manifest destiny [is] to overspread and possess the whole of the continent which Providence [God] has given us for the development of the great experiment of liberty and . . . self-government.

John O'Sullivan, *United States Magazine and Democratic Review*

John O'Sullivan used the word *manifest* to mean clear or obvious. The word *destiny* means events sure to happen. Therefore, **manifest destiny** suggested that expansion was not only good but bound to happen—even if it meant pushing Mexicans and Native Americans out of the way. After Polk's election in 1844, manifest destiny became government policy.

The term "manifest destiny" was new, but the idea was not. By the 1840s, thousands of Americans had moved into the Oregon Territory. Since 1818, Oregon had been occupied jointly by the United States and Britain. In his campaign, Polk had talked of taking over all of Oregon. "Fifty-four forty or fight!" screamed one of his slogans. The parallel of 54° 40' N latitude was the northern boundary of the shared Oregon Territory.

Rather than fight for all of Oregon, however, Polk settled for half. In 1846, the United States and Great Britain agreed to divide Oregon at the 49th parallel. This agreement extended the boundary line already drawn between Canada and the United States. Today this line still serves as the border between much of the United States and Canada.



***"Our manifest destiny [is] to . . . possess the whole of the continent."***

John O'Sullivan

## Troubles with Mexico

Polk had good reason for avoiding war with Britain over Oregon. By 1846, he had much bigger troubles brewing with Mexico over Texas.

In 1845, Congress admitted Texas as a slave state, in spite of Northern objections to the spread of slavery. However, Mexico still claimed Texas as its own. Mexico angrily viewed this annexation as an act of war. To make matters worse, Texas and Mexico could not agree on the official border between them. Texas claimed the Rio Grande, a river south of San Antonio, as its southern boundary. Mexico insisted on the Nueces (noo•AY•sis) River as the border of Texas. The difference in the distance between the two rivers was more than 100 miles at some points. Many thousands of miles of territory were at stake.

Mexico said it would fight to defend its claim. Hoping to settle the dispute peacefully, Polk sent John Slidell, a Spanish-speaking

**Reading History**  
Winfield Scott  
Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo  
Mexican Cession  
What were the positives and negatives of the idea of manifest destiny?



James Polk

**Reading History**  
Reading a Map  
Use the map on page 408 to find locations of disputed territory between the United States and Mexico.

ambassador, to offer Mexico \$25 million for Texas, California, and New Mexico. But Slidell's diplomacy failed.

Believing that the American people supported his expansion plans, Polk wanted to force the issue with Mexico. He purposely ordered General **Zachary Taylor** to station troops on the northern bank of the Rio Grande. This river bank was part of the disputed territory. Viewing this as an act of war, Mexico moved an army into place on the southern bank. On April 25, 1846, a Mexican cavalry unit crossed the Rio Grande. They ambushed an American patrol and killed or wounded 16 American soldiers.

When news of the attack reached Washington, Polk sent a rousing war message to Congress, saying, "Mexico has invaded our territory and shed American blood upon American soil." Two days later, Congress declared war. The War with Mexico had begun. Thousands of volunteers, mostly from western states, rushed to enlist in the army. Santa Anna, who was president of Mexico, built up the Mexican army.

However, Americans had mixed reactions to Polk's call for war. Illinois representative Abraham Lincoln questioned the truthfulness of the president's message and the need to declare war. Northeasterners questioned the justice of men dying in such a war. Slavery became an issue in the debates over the war. Southerners saw expansion into Texas as an opportunity to extend slavery and to increase their power in Congress. To

#### ReadingHistory

**C. Analyzing Causes** How did the War with Mexico start?

### The War with Mexico, 1846-1847



A symbol of the Bear Flag Revolt, this flag has a grizzly bear and a star made with blackberry juice. The revolt declared California independent from Mexico.

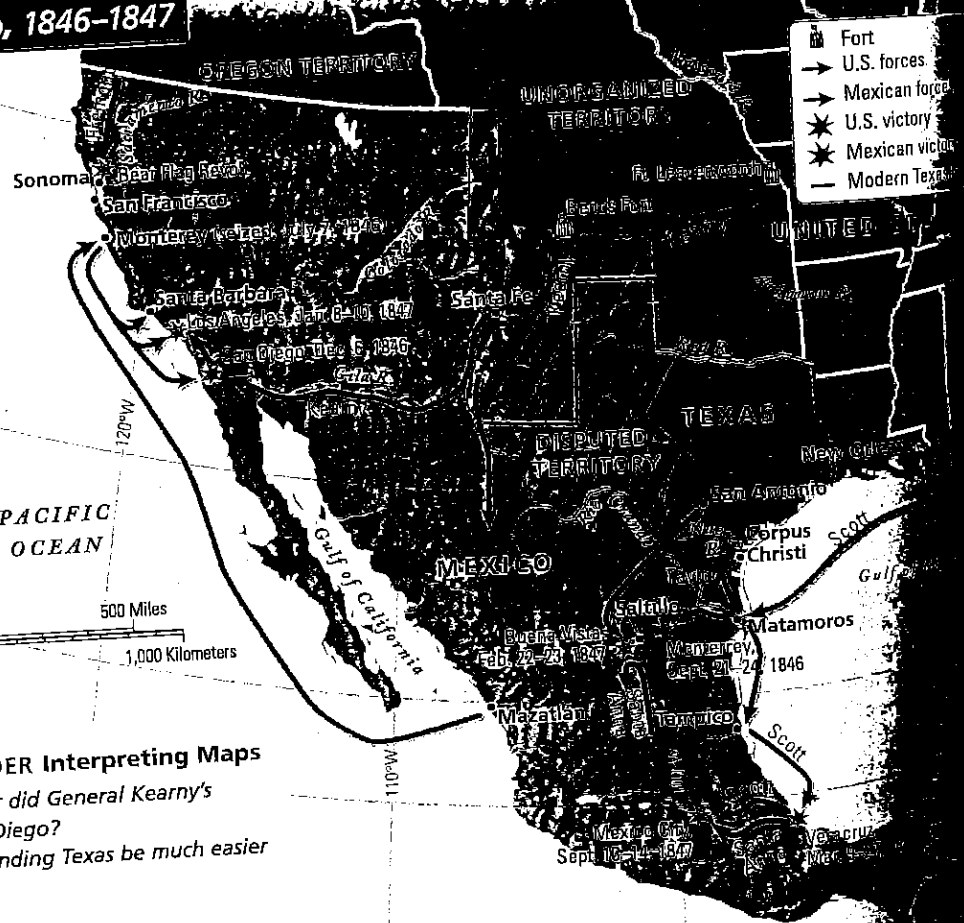
PACIFIC OCEAN



500 Miles  
1,000 Kilometers

#### GEOGRAPHY SKILLBUILDER Interpreting Maps

- 1. Movement** About how far did General Kearny's troops move to reach San Diego?
- 2. Location** Why would defending Texas be much easier than defending Mexico?



prevent this from happening, antislavery representatives introduced a bill to prohibit slavery in any lands taken from Mexico. Frederick Douglass, the abolitionist, summarized the arguments.

#### A VOICE FROM THE PAST

The determination of our slaveholding President to prosecute the war, and the probability of his success in wringing from the people men and money to carry it on, is made evident, . . . None seem willing to take their stand for peace at all risks; and all seem willing that the war should be carried on in some form or other.

Frederick Douglass in *The North Star*, January 21, 1848

Despite opposition, the United States plunged into war. In May 1846, General Taylor led troops into Mexico. Many Americans thought it would be easy to defeat the Mexicans, and the war would end quickly.

### Capturing New Mexico and California

Not long after the war began, General Stephen Kearny (KAHR•nee)—a U.S. Army officer—and his men left Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, with orders to occupy New Mexico. Then they were to continue west to California. As his troops marched along the Santa Fe Trail, they sang songs like this one.

#### A VOICE FROM THE PAST

Old Colonel Kearny, you can bet,  
Will keep the boys in motion,  
Till Yankee Land includes the sand  
On the Pacific Ocean.

Six weeks and 650 hot and rugged miles later, Kearny's army entered New Mexico. Using persuasion instead of force, he convinced the Mexican troops that he meant to withdraw. This allowed him to take New Mexico without firing a shot. Then Kearny and a small force of soldiers marched on toward California, which had only 8,000 to 12,000 Mexican residents. The remaining force moved south toward Mexico.

In California, Americans led by the explorer John C. Frémont rebelled against Mexican rule in the **Bear Flag Revolt**. They arrested the Mexican commander of Northern California and raised a crude flag showing a grizzly bear sketched in blackberry juice. The rebels declared California independent of Mexico and named it the Republic of California. In the fall, U.S. troops reached California and joined forces with the rebels. Within weeks, Americans controlled all of California.

### The Invasion of Mexico

The defeat of Mexico proved far more difficult. The Mexican army was much larger, but the U.S. troops

### STRANGE True

#### SANTA ANNA'S LOST LEG

Santa Anna lost his left leg in a battle with the French. In 1842, he held a funeral for his severed limb. On that day, church and political officials followed the dictator's leg through the streets of Mexico City to its final resting place—an urn placed on a column.

Two years later, an angry mob broke the urn and threw the leg away. The leg was rescued by a loyal soldier who took it home and hid it.

Thirty years later, that soldier visited Santa Anna and returned the bones of his long-lost leg.

Mexican army was much larger, but the U.S. troops were led by well-trained officers. American forces invaded Mexico from two directions.

General Taylor battled his way south from Texas toward the city of Monterrey in northern Mexico. On February 22, 1847, his 4,800 troops met General Santa Anna's 15,000 Mexican soldiers near a ranch called Buena Vista. After the first day of fighting, Santa Anna sent Taylor a note offering him a chance to surrender. Taylor declined. At the end of the second bloody day of fighting, Santa Anna reported that "both armies have been cut to pieces." However, it was Santa Anna who retreated after the Battle of Buena Vista. The war in the north of Mexico was over.

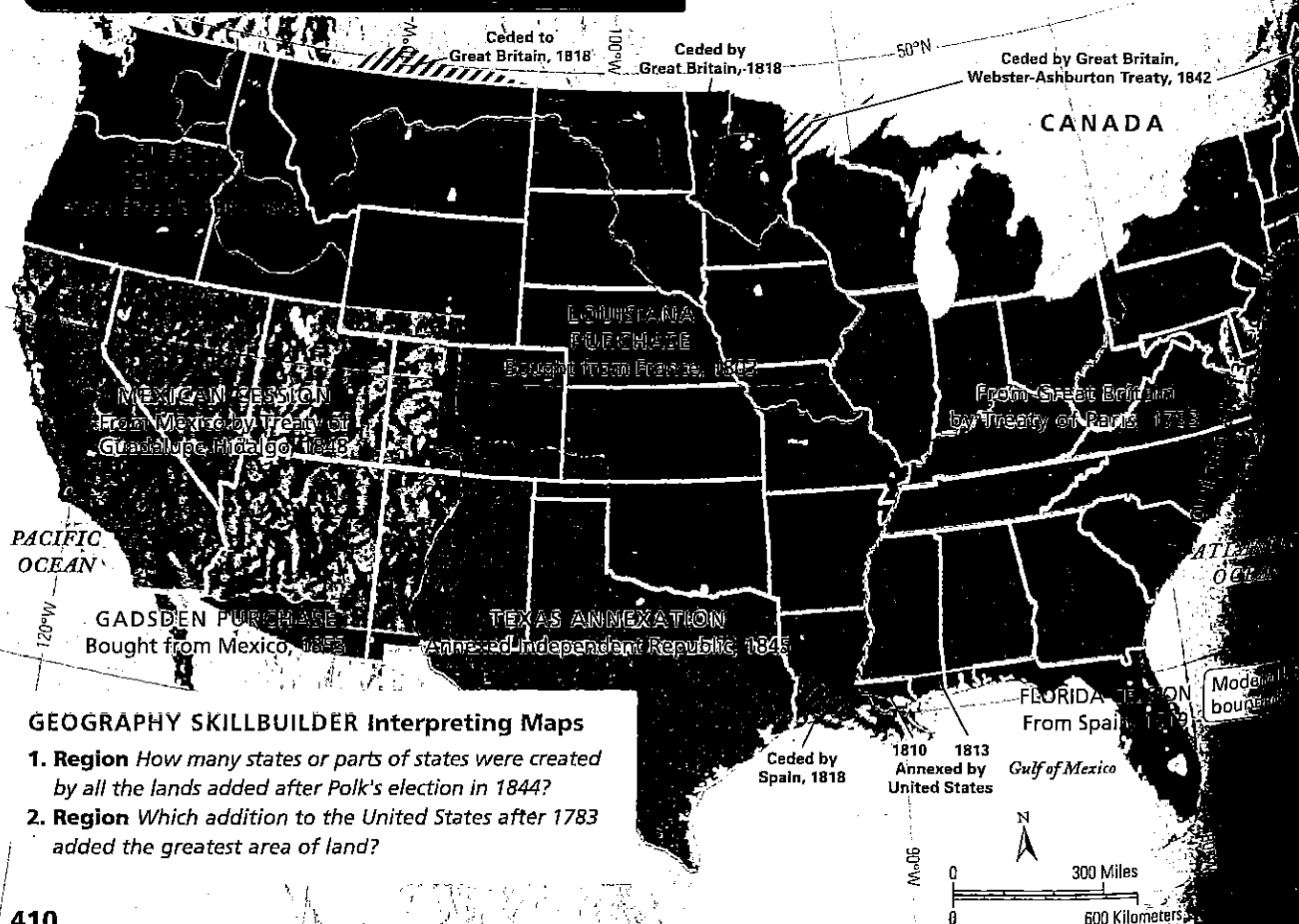
In southern Mexico, fighting continued. A second force led by General **Winfield Scott** landed at Veracruz on the Gulf of Mexico and battled inland toward Mexico City. Outside the capital, Scott met fierce resistance at the castle of Chapultepec (chuh•POOL•tuh•pek). About 1,000 soldiers and 100 young military cadets bravely defended the fortress. Despite their determined resistance, Mexico City fell to Scott in September 1847. As he watched, a Mexican officer sighed and said, "God is a Yankee."

**Background**  
General Winfield Scott had become a national hero during the War of 1812.

## The Mexican Cession

On February 2, 1848, the war officially ended with the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo (gwah•duh•LOOP•ay hih•DAHL•go). In this treaty, Mexico recognized that Texas was part of the United States, and the

### Growth of the United States, 1783–1853



#### GEOGRAPHY SKILLBUILDER Interpreting Maps

- 1. Region** How many states or parts of states were created by all the lands added after Polk's election in 1844?
- 2. Region** Which addition to the United States after 1783 added the greatest area of land?

### Reading History

**E. Finding Main Ideas** What were the three main parts of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo?

Rio Grande was the border between the nations. Mexico also ceded, or gave up, a vast region known as the **Mexican Cession**. This area included the present-day states of California, Nevada, Utah, most of Arizona, and parts of New Mexico, Colorado, and Wyoming. Together with Texas, this land amounted to almost one-half of Mexico. The loss was a bitter defeat for Mexico, particularly because many Mexicans felt that the United States had provoked the war in the hope of gaining Mexican territory.

In return, the United States agreed to pay Mexico \$15 million. The United States would also pay the \$3.25 million of claims U.S. citizens had against Mexico. Finally, it also promised to protect the approximately 80,000 Mexicans living in Texas and the Mexican Cession.

Mexicans living in the United States saw the conquest of their land differently. Suddenly they were a minority in a nation with a strange language, culture, and legal system. At the same time, they would make important contributions to their new country. They taught new settlers how to develop the land for farming, ranching, and mining. A rich new culture resulted from the blend of many cultures in the Mexican Cession.

### Reading History

**F. Making Inferences** Why did the United States pay a large price for the Gadsden Purchase?

## "From Sea to Shining Sea"

The last bit of territory added to the continental United States was a strip of land across what is now southern New Mexico and Arizona. The government wanted the land as a location for a southern transcontinental railroad. In 1853, Mexico sold the land—called the Gadsden Purchase—to the United States for \$10 million.

On July 4, 1848, in Washington, President Polk laid the cornerstone of a monument to honor George Washington. In Washington's day, the western border of the United States was the Mississippi River. The United States in 1848 now stretched "from sea to shining sea." In August, Polk learned that gold had been found in California. In the next section, you will read about the California gold rush.

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### Assessment

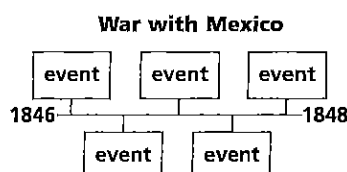
#### 1. Terms & Names

Explain the significance of:

James K. Polk  
Manifest destiny  
Zachary Taylor  
Bear Flag Revolt  
Winfield Scott  
Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo  
Mexican Cession

#### 2. Using Graphics

Review the chapter and find five key events to place on a time line as shown.



#### 3. Main Ideas

- How did the acquisitions of Oregon and the Mexican Cession relate to the idea of manifest destiny?
- Why were some people opposed to the War with Mexico?
- What does the phrase "sea to shining sea" mean?

#### 4. Critical Thinking

**Comparing** Compare the different ways land was acquired by the United States in the period of manifest destiny from 1844 to 1853.

#### THINK ABOUT

- the acquisition of the Oregon Territory
- lands in the Southwest

#### ACTIVITY OPTIONS

In an almanac, find the current population of the states formed from the Mexican Cession. Create a graph or a map to display the information.